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Security Council

Fifty-fourth Year

Provisional

4029th Meeting

Friday, 30 July 1999, 3.55 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Hasmy	(Malaysia)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Petrella
	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Moura
	Canada	Mr. Duval
	China	Mr. Chen Xu
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Gabon	Mr. Dangue Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Namibia	Mr. Andjaba
	Netherlands	Mr. Hamer
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Richmond
	United States of America	Mr. Burleigh

Agenda

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1999/805)

99-85642 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.55 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1999/805)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Georgia and Germany, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili (Georgia) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Witschel (Germany) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them the report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, document S/1999/805. Members also have before them document S/1999/832, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations.

I should also like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to the following documents: S/1999/801, 813 and 814, letters dated 19, 22 and 22 July, respectively, from Georgia addressed to the President of the Security Council; and S/1999/809, letter dated 21 July 1999 from Georgia to the Secretary-General.

The first speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili. I welcome him and invite him to make his statement.

Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia): I am greatly honoured to have the opportunity to address this important forum on issues related to the current situation in Abkhazia, Georgia.

But may I first express our sincere gratitude to the United Nations, the Security Council and the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, as well as to the group of countries known as Friends of the Secretary-General, for their continued support of Georgia's territorial integrity and for their active participation in the peace process. Their contributions are truly invaluable.

The problem of Abkhazia is the most complex and painful issue in Georgia's recent history, and its urgent settlement is essential to restoring stability in the whole Caucasian region. Regrettably, the peace process is stalled, and despite our joint efforts there has been no tangible progress in the course of negotiations which could enable us to break the existing impasse.

I believe that the seven long years that have elapsed since the outbreak of hostilities are more than enough to properly assess the development of the conflict and to precisely define the steps which would once and for all put an end to the dispute.

Council members' profound knowledge of the present issue makes it unnecessary for me to go into a detailed account of the history of the conflict in Abkhazia or to speak in detail of its roots and reasons. I just wish to remind the Council of the danger that the separatist trend poses to international peace. Drawing on our own experience, we can conclude that, if not handled adequately, these conflicts could well escalate into large-scale confrontations, involving other countries and regions. The example of Kosovo clearly indicates the necessity of taking urgent measures in volatile regions to prevent confrontation, by peaceful means, lest the use of force be seen as the only alternative to such action.

We believe that the time has come for the world community to take necessary measures against those who for certain reasons seek to kindle internal disputes and impede negotiated agreements. Thus, it is time properly to assess the violence in one of the regions of Georgia, Abkhazia, as a result of which 300,000 refugees and displaced persons have been desperately waiting for six years to return to their homes. During and after the war, about three fourths of the entire population of Abkhazia fled the region, among them 250,000 Georgians, 50,000

Abkhazians and more than 100,000 Armenians, Russians and Jews.

I wish to stress that we are dealing here with the same kind of humanitarian catastrophe against which the international community voiced its firm stance in Kosovo. We are not inclined to draw parallels. I am just trying to focus the Council's attention on a fact that I touched upon during my statement before the Council in January this year, namely that it is unacceptable to classify conflicts into "first-rate" and "inferior" ones, and to place the latter among the so-called frozen conflicts. Unfortunately, the conflict in Abkhazia has long been assigned to that category.

We are strongly committed to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia. At the same time, we are confident that the demands and assessment of the destructive policy of the Abkhaz side should become more articulate and clear, for only this can accelerate and contribute to the peace process.

Allow me to put forward some of the principles that we deem it essential for the United Nations to rely upon while handling the present situation in Abkhazia, Georgia. The outright obstruction of negotiations by the Abkhaz side raises question as to how long we can accept a status quo in the region established as a result of these fruitless negotiations. The seeming calm in Abkhazia is just an illusion. As a matter of fact, the situation is sharply worsening. Political, social and economic conditions are disastrous. Abkhazia has become a scene of raging crime and impunity. Despite the efforts of the Georgian Government and the international community, the plight of the displaced persons and the returnees remains unspeakable.

I think the time has come for the Security Council clearly to point to the unacceptability of this stagnation and categorically to urge the Abkhaz side to take constructive action.

I wish particularly to stress the situation of the refugees and those who have spontaneously returned to the Gali region. Regrettably, the violence and assaults against the peaceful population still continue. Ethnic-related killings, hostage-taking and executions are frequent. Particularly worrisome are the statements of the Abkhaz authorities alluding to the possibility of repeating the events of May 1998. All this is happening in the context of cynical statements by the Abkhaz authorities regarding the "unilateral initiative" to start the repatriation of the refugees and displaced persons. It is necessary to urgently consider the question of the ethnic cleansing carried out against the Georgian population and to reflect the findings in relevant documents of the Security Council.

We have already circulated, as annexes to document S/1999/814, materials relating to an international seminar held in Tbilisi on 6 and 7 July 1999, which addressed the topic of "The policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia, Georgia: the principal weapon of aggressive separatism". I am confident that nobody will remain indifferent to the facts of the violence reflected in these materials.

On that basis, the Security Council should once again recall the decisions of the Budapest and Lisbon summits of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and should stress that obstruction of the return of the refugees and displaced persons is nothing but a continuation of the policy of ethnic cleansing. This provision will trigger adequate action on the part of the Security Council in line with the spirit and the letter of the United Nations Charter.

The decision of the Abkhaz authorities to hold so-called presidential elections in Abkhazia, Georgia, in the autumn of 1999 is one more attempt to establish the demographic changes resulting from the conflict. It constitutes outright disregard of the position of the international community, which can in no way accept the holding of elections when more than half of the population is unable to participate in them and has been expelled from their homes. I believe that the Security Council should severely condemn the intention of the Abkhaz side to hold such "elections", declare it unlawful and strictly warn the Abkhaz authorities that such actions may seriously damage the peace process.

Let me assure the Council that finger-pointing is not our purpose. Our goal is to really move the peace process out of the deadlock. To this effect, we believe that the Security Council should assume the leadership. First, we would welcome the Secretary-General elaborating, with the participation of the Friends of the Secretary-General and based on experience throughout the world, the basic provisions for the political status of Abkhazia within Georgia, proceeding from the understanding that future negotiations on a political settlement will draw upon those provisions.

We have recently circulated the proposals of the Government of Georgia, entitled "Basic principles for determining the status of Abkhazia within the new State structure of Georgia", annexed to document S/1999/813, providing our views on this important matter. We have come out with similar statements in the past, but the Abkhaz side has flatly rejected all of them. In pursuing such a position, the Abkhaz side is clearly disregarding the resolutions of the Security Council, which has more than once reiterated its respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. We strongly believe that future dialogue on political status must be based on the suggestions of the United Nations, which would contribute to the constructive outcome of the negotiation process.

The most complicated issue in the peace process is clearly the question of the repatriation of the refugees and displaced persons. Despite our common efforts, this process too is stalled. The main stumbling block remains the absence of conditions of security. Past experience has shown that, within their present mandate, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeepers too are unable to guarantee the safety of the returnees.

We therefore deem it appropriate to work out the structure of an interim international administration for the Gali district which would facilitate the repatriation of the refugees and at the same time carry out the regulation and management of social and economic issues until a fundamental political agreement is reached. Such a model would ensure the participation of the returnees in the system of governance and would also contribute to public confidence-building. It is also imperative to grant the returnees a special status which would provide them with the immunity necessary to ensure their constitutional rights. The United Nations should also confirm the right of all the refugees and displaced persons to the private property they had possessed before fleeing the region.

Undoubtedly the process of repatriation should be carried out in accordance with the timetable provided by the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, defining the security conditions for the returnees in the entire territory of Abkhazia, Georgia.

We believe that the Security Council should categorically indicate to the Abkhaz side that the return of the refugees and displaced persons is not just a favour offered by the Abkhaz authorities, but constitutes the right of all the refugees and displaced persons in accordance with the principles of international law. The responsibility for any violation of this right will lie with the separatist regime.

We attach particular importance to the security conditions of the international personnel in the conflict zone. We believe that only under secure conditions can the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia resume its activities in full, as set forth in its mandate. On behalf of the Government of Georgia I wish to express once again our readiness to do all in our power to ensure the safety of international personnel, though we believe that additional measures should be taken to this end.

Georgia has always supported the idea of introducing a self-protection unit in the conflict zone. The purpose of this unit would be the protection and promotion of the United Nations Observer Mission. The tragic events of May 1998 in the Gali region once again proved the necessity of deploying such units in the conflict zone. Unfortunately, instead of its being urgently implemented, the idea disappeared into oblivion. I strongly believe that this initiative should be brought up again. We think the Security Council should require the Secretary-General to resume consultations on the proposal set out in his 11 May 1998 report regarding the introduction of self-protection units.

The future of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping operation also still remains a problem. Georgia believes that the CIS peacekeeping operation will be fully functional only after the implementation of the principle decisions adopted at the recent summits of the CIS. Unfortunately, the Abkhaz side is blocking the fulfilment of those decisions, leaving the CIS peacekeepers in the conflict zone with a mandate that expired some months ago.

We have more than once reiterated our strong commitment to the Geneva process, which appears to be the main forum for the comprehensive settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. I wish to once again thank the Secretary-General for paving the way for this process and to express our readiness to work actively within the framework of the Geneva negotiations. In this respect we welcome the holding of meetings in Athens and Istanbul, which were effective in building mutual trust. I would also like to express our gratitude to the Government of Ukraine for its willingness to host a similar meeting in Crimea.

At the same time I am confident that the Geneva process must be intensified through more active efforts

by its participants. They will yield positive results and prevent the process from becoming a mere discussion club.

Unfortunately, cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on resolving the conflict is still lagging. We believe that the Security Council should stress the importance of the decision adopted at the December 1998 Oslo ministerial meeting of OSCE, which provides fundamental provisions with regard to the comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia and which constitutes a programme for the promotion of the cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE.

Today I brought to the Council's attention some of our views regarding the ways to settle the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, with the assistance of the United Nations, its Security Council and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General. I wish to reiterate our strong resolve to cooperate further with the Organization and with the international community in this respect.

We are confident that this is the only right way to reach lasting peace in my country. But it is also important that we make more resolute and energetic steps on this road to peace and stability.

Let me express hope that the Council will take into account our views and reflect them in its decisions.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Germany. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Witschel (Germany): As a member of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia, Germany fully supports and welcomes the draft resolution before the Council today. The draft contains several important messages addressed directly to the parties, reflecting our grave concern and the sense of urgency in the face of the volatile political situation in and around Abkhazia, Georgia. The fate of the many thousands of persons who were forced to leave their homes, the lack of substantive progress towards a political settlement and the continuing danger to which peacekeepers from the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the Commonwealth of Independent States are exposed are alarming indeed.

Let me try to elaborate in some more detail what we consider to be the essential elements for a solution to the conflict as reflected in the draft before the Council.

First, the territorial integrity of Georgia is and remains the only basis for any solution of the Abkhaz conflict. Secondly, there must not be another solution to the conflict other than a peaceful arrangement between the parties. Only a substantial dialogue marked by the genuine political will of both sides to come to a fair settlement can bring about a durable solution. Thirdly, all mechanisms for this dialogue are in place. Therefore we call upon the parties to use them in good faith. The progress achieved in the Geneva process led by the United Nations, and the momentum gained through the two meetings in Athens and Istanbul on confidence-building measures, must not be lost. We therefore appeal to both sides to be as cooperative and compromising as possible — both within the Geneva framework and in direct bilateral contacts — and to go ahead with implementing those confidence-building measures that have already been agreed upon.

Let me add how much we welcome the announcement of the Secretary-General on submitting a paper on the status of Abkhazia within the State of Georgia for the consideration of the parties this fall. We are looking forward to participating actively — together with the other members of the Group of Friends, as well as with the Russian Federation as facilitator, and with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) — in the elaboration of this important document. We hope that this paper will give fresh impetus to the efforts of working towards a comprehensive solution to the conflict.

One of the most crucial problems, if not the most crucial one, that remains to be solved is that of refugee return. We urge the parties to the conflict to reach a sustainable and credible agreement on this matter now. The Council may rest assured that we will feel a strong resolve to actively support any concrete steps to implement such an agreement.

The security situation remains, despite some progress, very delicate, still making it impossible for UNOMIG to completely fulfil its tasks. We continue to follow very closely the security situation of our own personnel. Part of the responsibility for the unsatisfactory security situation continues to lie with elements operating from the Georgian side of the demarcation line. Let me therefore once again strongly urge Georgia to take determined steps to stop guerrilla attacks and mine-laying in UNOMIG's operation theatre.

Let me end by expressing Germany's deep appreciation for the dedicated work done by the retiring Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota, and the members of UNOMIG, in a tense and dangerous environment. In our opinion, it is a matter of utmost urgency to swiftly appoint a qualified successor in order not to create a vacuum which would only lead to the deterioration of the situation on the ground.

The President: It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I shall first give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation took an active part in preparing the draft resolution before the Security Council. The draft's main objective, we believe, is to move forward the process of settling the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

Our particular concern in having a draft resolution of precisely this nature stems from our heartfelt desire to help the peoples of Georgia — with whom we are linked by centuries-old ties of friendship and mutual respect — to resolve this crisis situation. This will enable them fully to focus on the urgent tasks of achieving sustainable economic growth and creating a political system that will guarantee the triumph of democracy and the observance of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including the rights of national minorities. Russia fully intends to facilitate the speedy settlement of this conflict, which would have a positive impact on the situation throughout the whole region of the Caucasus.

Russia, in close cooperation with the United Nations, is continuing vigorously to search for the optimal formula for a settlement that would provide for the unconditional preservation of the territorial integrity of Georgia as well as a form of self-government for Abkhazia that would be acceptable to the parties and that would ensure that the interests of its multi-ethnic population are safeguarded.

We deem counterproductive calls for the use of force to resolve the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, as this would to an extreme degree complicate the process of settlement and could lead to the explosion of the whole situation in the Caucasus, which is already fairly volatile. We are pleased to note that this approach is shared by members of the Council.

We are deeply concerned at the lack of progress on key aspects of the settlement, and we are prepared to continue to assist the parties in reaching mutually acceptable agreements.

At this stage, the most acute problem remains the return of refugees to the Gali region. As a result of the active mediation efforts of Russia, in close cooperation with the United Nations, the sides are in substantially greater agreement on the draft protocol on the return of refugees to the Gali region and on measures for economic recovery. It is important that the parties demonstrate the necessary resolve and sign the document that they have virtually agreed upon, which would open the way to resolving other settlement-related problems.

In our view, the political process as a whole has been significantly assisted by the fairly effective mechanism that was established with the assistance of the United Nations and personally by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, Mr. Liviu Bota: the standing mechanism of working meetings between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. This, in tandem with work on the political documents, allows for progress to be made on mutual confidence-building measures and for the intensification of economic and cultural cooperation between the parties. It is important that the agreements reached by the parties in these areas be implemented.

We welcome the meetings held in Athens and Istanbul between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia. We take note of the value of these meetings from the point of view of maintaining the positive dynamism in the dialogue between the parties and of building confidence between them.

We are pleased to note the continuing close interaction between the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in resolving the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. This cooperation is taking place strictly on the basis of Chapter VIII of the Charter, and the activities of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States are backed by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, which repeatedly have welcomed the important contribution of the CIS peacekeeping force in helping to stabilize the situation in the conflict zone.

A little more than a month ago, 21 June, marked the fifth anniversary of the deployment, at the request of the parties, of the CIS peacekeeping force in Abkhazia, Georgia. During that period, through the peacemaking efforts of the CIS, 23,000 explosive devices have been rendered harmless and more than 250 hectares of arable land demined. This force, through its very presence, has also enhanced the security of the refugees who have been spontaneously returning to the Gali region.

The Russian delegation supports the further six-month extension of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia. We share the view of the Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding the substantive and important role of the Mission in stabilizing the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, and in seeking to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

While we attach great importance to the question of security in the area of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, we deem it only fair to point out that recently the situation in this region has considerably improved, although it does remain rather fragile. We have also taken steps to enhance the effectiveness of the CIS peacekeeping force in order to ensure the security of the international personnel of the United Nations.

The Russian Federation is seriously concerned at the persistent terrorist activities of the so-called uncontrolled armed groups in the Gali region, which increasingly are targeting civilians. We agree with the Secretary-General that it is precisely these terrorist groups that are the main cause of instability and tension in the area of conflict, and we demand that the sides take decisive action to put an end to their criminal and destructive activities.

Russia is prepared to continue to do its utmost to ensure that the parties reach mutually acceptable agreements and that progress in made towards an overall political settlement.

Mr. Richmond (United Kingdom): I welcome the presence here among us of the Foreign Minister of Georgia.

The United Kingdom believes that a durable peace in Georgia will come about only if all concerned make a serious and sustained political commitment to achieve a settlement.

The onus for doing this remains with the two parties. Both sides need to demonstrate the political will to break the current deadlock. An important first step is early agreement on the guarantees on security and legal status, which will make it possible for refugees to return safely and permanently to the Gali district.

A comprehensive settlement must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of Georgia. Any action which contravenes this basic principle is unacceptable. In this respect, the British Government regards the holding of self-styled Abkhaz elections as both illegitimate and unhelpful to the search for a settlement.

The volatile security situation in Georgia is also a major concern. We reiterate our condemnation of terrorist activities in Gali and other parts of Georgia and call on both sides to work actively to prevent further incidents and provocations.

We welcome the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and, in paying tribute to the Mission's work, we also acknowledge the valuable role played by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force in cooperation with it, and stress the importance of the continued presence of the force.

Although primary responsibility for resolving the conflict rests with the parties, the international community also has its part to play. The draft resolution before us shows the depth of the Council's concern at the continuing impasse. Members of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General need to consider whether we should become even more actively engaged in working for solutions.

The United Kingdom remains committed to working with the Secretary-General's Special Representative, the Secretariat and the other members of the Friends Group, not least with the Russian Federation as facilitator, to support the parties in the search for a just and durable peace.

In conclusion, I should like to record my delegation's appreciation for the work of the outgoing Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota. In carrying out his mandate tirelessly in difficult and often frustrating circumstances, he has shown the value of having an effective resident Special Representative in Georgia. Given the leading role of the United Nations in the peace process, we attach considerable importance to the early appointment of a well qualified successor.

Mr. Dejammet (France) (*spoke in French*): Despite some limited progress, such as the easing of tension along the ceasefire line in recent months, the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, is still a matter for concern. For more than seven years, peace, security and prosperity have been losing ground to civil war, to attacks on the fundamental rights of civilian populations and to ethnic cleansing, as explicitly noted in the conclusions of the Lisbon summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Hundreds of thousands of refugees driven from their homes by Abkhaz militias are still denied the guarantees they need to return home for good. The parties should accept assistance from the competent international bodies in working towards the necessary arrangements.

The lack of meaningful progress in defining a status for Abkhazia that would respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia is another matter for concern. Here, the elections planned in Abkhazia, Georgia, seem to constitute a new setback. The selection of voters on the basis of racial, ethnic or religious criteria, in violation of the most basic international standards, is completely unacceptable and must be unequivocally condemned. Moreover, any balloting based on such practices must be regarded as null and void.

Overall, the prospect of a political settlement seems to be blocked. This persistence of a status quo that flouts international law and brings instability to the area is unacceptable. Goodwill is needed from all to facilitate a political settlement. It is therefore to be hoped that the parties will demonstrate openness and give favourable consideration to the ideas that the Secretary-General and his Special Representative plan to submit to them in coming months. These new contributions to the search for a solution should be welcomed as an opportunity to revive the peace process.

For its part, France fully supports United Nations activities to resolve the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and joins other delegations in paying tribute to the departing Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Liviu Bota.

For all these reasons, we shall support the draft resolution before us.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): We too would like to welcome the Foreign Minister of Georgia, who is with us here this afternoon.

The United States remains committed to the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). We believe that it can continue to play a constructive role in the overall peace process in Georgia. Therefore, we unhesitatingly support its renewal.

We note, however, that, despite the recent confidence-building meetings held in Athens and Istanbul, we are concerned about the absence of real progress on the negotiating front. There have been too many false hopes of important agreements that were dashed at the eleventh hour. The United States and the rest of the international community want the peace process to go forward. For that to happen, the sides must demonstrate the will to proceed. The international community and the Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia are ready to help with assistance, particularly with the refugees from Gali. But the sides need to demonstrate their commitment to that goal. With the upcoming Georgian elections, both sides may see excuses to delay. We hope that this is not the case, because time may not be on the side of peace.

We owe much of the progress that has been achieved in the past two years to the contributions of Mr. Liviu Bota, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Georgia during this period. Mr. Bota's leadership, supported by that of the Secretary-General, was indispensable in bringing about the ceasefire in May 1998 and was a subsequent impetus to negotiations that led the parties to Athens and Istanbul, and that will lead them to Yalta in the fall. We thank and compliment the United Nations leadership on this issue, and would like to express our gratitude and admiration to Liviu Bota for his devotion to the search for peace in Georgia. We wish him well in all his future endeavours. The vital role played by Mr. Bota underlines the need for swift appointment of his replacement. The new Special Representative should be chosen on the basis of qualifications, not nationality.

We also take note of last month's five-year anniversary of the Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeeping force in Georgia.

Finally, we again call upon the two sides to negotiate seriously and in good faith, to honour their commitments and the ceasefire, and to fulfil their obligation to safeguard international peacekeepers. The ultimate success or failure of the peace process is their responsibility. These are clear and unambiguous standards that form the foundation for the durable peace that we all seek.

Mr. Chen Xu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish at the outset to welcome the Foreign Minister of Georgia, who is participating in today's meeting.

The conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, has been going on for more than seven years. In all this time, the international community has never ceased its mediation efforts, and the Security Council has been closely monitoring the peace process in Abkhazia, Georgia.

We greatly appreciate the mediation efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General, his Special Representative and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia.

I have noted that recently there has been positive progress in the situation in the region. However, some crucial problems remain unresolved, and the political settlement process has reached an impasse. The unilateral decision to hold presidential elections this autumn has cast a new shadow over the peace process.

The Chinese delegation would like to reiterate that China has always maintained that in the process of settling the Abkhaz conflict, the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia should be respected by the international community. At the same time, the basic rights of the multi-ethnic population of the Abkhaz region should be duly protected. The Chinese delegation opposes any acts aimed at dividing the territory of Georgia. We believe that the unilateral decision to hold presidential elections in Abkhazia is illegitimate and should not, therefore, receive international recognition.

At the most fundamental level, the ultimate resolution of the problem of Georgia will depend on the peoples of Georgia themselves. International efforts can be effective only when both sides share a political will. We hope, therefore, that the two sides will put the fundamental interests of the multi-ethnic population of Georgia above all other considerations, settle their differences through negotiations and conclude the necessary agreements on such issues as the return of refugees and economic reconstruction, so as to create favourable conditions for the resolution of the essential question of the political status of Abkhazia.

Since its inception, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) has maintained very good, cooperative relations with the two sides to the conflict and with the Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeeping force. It has played an important role in stabilizing the situation on the ground and in seeking a political settlement of the conflict. We believe that the continuing presence of UNOMIG will help to promote the peace process in Georgia. We therefore endorse the Secretary-General's proposal to extend the mandate of UNOMIG and will vote in favour of the draft resolution before us. We hope that UNOMIG will continue faithfully to implement the mandate of the Security Council. We also hope that the security and safety of the personnel of UNOMIG will be ensured.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Bota, for his efforts and his contribution to a political settlement of the Abkhaz conflict in Georgia.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to state publicly my appreciation for the professional, able and effective way in which you, Sir, have presided this month over the work of the Council, which has been so intensive and so fruitful.

I should like to offer a warm welcome to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia and thank him for the important statement that he has just made to the Security Council. I should also like to take this opportunity to refer to the excellent bilateral relations of friendship and cooperation between Argentina and Georgia, which we are rightly proud of and pleased about.

We should like to pay tribute to the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota, as well as to those of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in promoting the stabilization of the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, and giving new impetus to the peace process led by the United Nations.

We are pleased to note that the situation along the ceasefire line has improved and that the parties are now showing greater restraint. However, insecurity prevails in the lower Gali region. The activity of terrorist groups is intolerable, and in this atmosphere of insecurity, the refugees and displaced persons hardly feel encouraged to return home. Furthermore, the security of the mission is still a serious cause for concern. As for the peace process, the confidence-building measures, bilateral contacts at all levels and cooperation between the parties should be encouraged. In this connection, it is important that the draft resolution encourage positive developments in connection with the agreements arrived at in Athens

and Istanbul in October 1998 and June 1999 respectively, with a view to enhancing confidence, improving security and promoting cooperation.

However, in order to arrive at a settlement of the conflict, political will is also needed so that a constructive dialogue can begin and be maintained in the sprit of the 1994 Moscow Agreement. In this context, the forthcoming elections in Abkhazia should be regarded as illegitimate, as the draft resolution makes clear. We agree with the Secretary-General's recommendation that the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) be extended for a further six months.

In conclusion, we should like to extend our congratulations to Mr. Bota and the UNOMIG personnel for their important work, carried out under difficult and dangerous circumstances. Recognition goes in particular to Russia for its efforts as the facilitator.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina for the kind words he addressed to me.

I shall now put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/1999/832.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Gabon, Gambia, Malaysia, Namibia, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Slovenia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1255 (1999).

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Before adjourning the meeting, I should like on behalf of all members of the Security Council to bid farewell to Mrs. Neylan Bali, Director of the Security Council Affairs Division and Secretary of the Council, as she leaves the Secretariat after many years of dedicated and distinguished service. The members of the Council, and especially the President of the Council, have benefited greatly from her efficiency, knowledge and advice over the years in connection with the many delicate and critical matters with which the Council is called upon to deal. We shall miss her. On behalf of the members of the Council, I extend best wishes to her in her future endeavours.

May I also express my thanks to colleagues on the Council for the cooperation they have unfailingly given to me and the members of my delegation throughout the Malaysian presidency.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.